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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000052

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [ML](#)
SUBJECT: (S) EFFORTS TO LOCATE NEW EUROPEAN HOSTAGES IN
NORTHERN MALI INTENSIFY

REF: BAMAKO 00047

Classified By: Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(S) On January 24 a Taghat Melet Tuareg from Kidal contacted the Embassy to report that Tuareg nomads had seen several Tuaregs and four captured westerners one day earlier, on January 23, at a water point north east of Anderamboukane in northern Mali. Four western tourists - two Swiss, one British and one German national - were captured in Niger, just south of Anderamboukane, on January 22 (Ref. A). On January 23 nomads reportedly observed several well-known Malian Tuareg traffickers drawing water at a well approximately 120 km north east of a better known water point, Insinane, which is roughly 90 KM due east of Anderamboukane along the border with Niger. Four westerners were seen from a distance in the back of one of the traffickers' vehicles, their heads covered with a hood. At one point one of the captives descended from the vehicle, providing those observing with a more conclusive look to permit identification as a westerner.

2.(S) The same contact indicated that at least one of the captors was known to Tuaregs in the Gao and Menaka zones as a bandit and trafficker. This is Intewika ag Ahmayed (aka Ousmane). Ousmane is a Taghat Melet Tuareg. Two of the other alleged captors were identified by first name and tribal affiliations only: Tibla and Mohamed, both Chamanamas Tuaregs from the Gao-Menaka area. Other Tuaregs, reportedly belonging to the Imghad group of Malian Tuaregs, also appear to be among the captors. The Embassy received satellite telephone numbers for Ousmane and Tibla.

3.(S) The Embassy received this information early on the morning of January 24 and immediately reported it through other channels. The Embassy also relayed this information to well-placed officials within the Malian government in order to begin the processes of zeroing in on the hostages and their alleged captors. During the evening of January 24 the Taghat Melet contact informed the Embassy that he was now certain that Ousmane, Tibla, and Mohamed were the ones who abducted the four tourists south of Anderamboukane on January 22 and were still holding them somewhere north of Anderamboukane and Menaka in the region of Gao. On January 25 the Embassy's Taghat Melet contact said he had sent a private emissary to meet with the hostage takers to convince them to liberate the hostages instead of passing them off to AQIM. The Embassy shared this information with representatives from the British and German governments dispatched to Bamako on January 25.

4.(S) We do not believe that the Malian government is aware of the private emissary already sent by the Taghat Melet Tuareg to establish contact with those claiming to hold the captured tourists. On January 25 a member of the Malian government informed the Embassy that President Toure was ready to send another well-placed Tuareg, Sikaye ag Ekawel, to the Menaka area to locate the hostage takers. Sikaye is one of the senior leaders of Mali's Chamanamas Tuaregs. The Malian official reported that Sikaye also believed the four tourists were captured by the same group of Malian Tuareg traffickers, but that he would need to travel to the Menaka area to find them to be certain. The official said Mali could not invest Sikaye with such a mission without a direct request from one of the governments involved - meaning either the U.K. or Germany.

5.(S) Meanwhile, the Embassy's Taghat Melet contact urged us to give him until 13h00 local time on January 26 before asking the Malian government to involve Sikaye. Concerned that mixed messengers could muddy the waters, we relayed this information to the British Ambassador during the evening of January 25, presenting the pros and cons as we see them but ultimately stressing that it was the U.K. and Germany's decision as to how to proceed. The British and German Ambassadors were scheduled to meet with President Toure sometime on January 26.

6.(S) Early on the morning of January 26 the Embassy's Taghat Melet contact informed us that he had been contacted by President Toure who inquired if he would be willing to intercede with the Taghat Melet contingent of those claiming

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to have the captured tourists. Our contact said he told Toure he would be willing to help. It does not appear, however, that he informed President Toure of his own efforts, already underway, to contact the alleged hostage takers. We were also told the emissary had located the hostage takers and reported back that there were now 9 new hostages, apparently taken on January 25. We have no/no confirmation of this new group and are unsure of the veracity of this claim.

7.(S) The captors reportedly said they would be willing to let one of the hostages - either one of the four captured on January 22 or one of the 9 reportedly captured on January 25 - speak to someone in Bamako. The alleged captors also asked how much they would receive for the 4 tourists captured January 22 and the 9 other they claim to have captured on January 25. This appears to be an attempt to encourage European countries to outbid the price already offered by AQIM, or at least hoped for by the possible hostage takers.

8.(S) The alleged captors reportedly agreed to receive a negotiating delegation composed of selected Tuareg leaders of their choice. Ousmane, who appears to be the senior Taghat Melet Tuareg among the captors, has already identified who he would prefer as a Taghat Melet representative: Sikabar ag Ouefane, a Tuareg who is also well known to the Embassy. We are currently waiting for the captors to relay their choices for representatives from the Chamanamas and Imghad Tuareg communities. The Chamanamas representative will likely be Sikaye ag Ekawel. Two possible choices from the Imghad side are Col. Elhedj Gamou who is currently leading Mali's offensive against other Tuaregs aligned with rebel leader Ibrahim Bahanga north of Kidal, or another Tuareg member of the Malian military named Faisel who is reportedly based in Gao.

9.(S) Our Taghat Melet contact indicated that he would also be willing to participate, per President Toure's request, in an eventual commission of Tuareg leaders sent to meet with the presumed captors. He noted, however, that this mission could not occur without the official endorsement of the Malian government. We are not dealing directly with the Government of Mali on this but instead fully informing the

British and German Embassies here for them to take action if they choose.

10.(S) Comment: We stress that we have no independent confirmation, beyond an extremely small circle of well-placed Tuaregs in Bamako, that Ousmane et. al. are indeed holding the four captured tourists. However, our Taghat Melet contact has provided extremely useful and reliable information in the past, and his current information appears credible. More importantly, we are aware of no other clues regarding the four tourists' whereabouts and therefore believe it imperative to follow up on this lead as quickly as possible. We have been trying, with moderate success, to stress this level of urgency to the German and British representatives now in Bamako. We believe following up on this lead is urgent for the following reasons: (1) If this group is indeed responsible for kidnapping the four tourists, they are no longer anonymous and therefore cannot hope to disappear into the wilderness after passing the four to AQIM.

It may therefore be in their interest to release the four so that they can at the very least avoid being classified as "terrorists" as opposed to their current classification as "bandits" and "traffickers;" (2) There is a possibility that well placed Taghat Melet, Chamanamas and Imghad Tuareg leaders from Mali can either talk this group down, or find a way of resolving the crisis internally. Our Taghat Melet contact has previously negotiated the release of Tuaregs from AQIM and also Malian soldiers from the hands of Tuareg rebels, so there is some hope that he can do the same with this group; (3) At some point this group, if they indeed have the tourists, will pass them to AQIM. This window is rapidly closing and the longer we can delay this hand over through talks with respected and influential Tuareg leaders, the less chance the tourists will be passed to AQIM; (4) If these new hostages are passed to AQIM, this will greatly complicate efforts to release the two Canadian hostages already believed to be in AQIM's hands. We have relayed all of these concerns to the British, German, Swiss and Canadian representatives now in Bamako.

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